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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANAGUA 000783

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WHA/CEN, INR/I

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SUBJECT: CONSERVATIVE PARTY WILL TAKE &AKIDO8 APPROACH TO
REIGNING IN PARTY DISSIDENTS (C-AL7-00063)

REF: 2006 MANAGUA 2651

Classified By: Ambassador Paul A. Trivelli. Reasons 1.4 (B,D).

11. (C) Summary: Conservative Party president Azalia Aviles Salmeron and PC National Assembly lawmaker Alejandro Bolanos are determined to strengthen their party and maintain its alliance with Eduardo Montealegre's Nicaraguan Liberal Alliance. While ultimately they would prefer to establish a Conservative Party caucus in the Assembly, they are unwilling to do so at this juncture because they do not wish to jeopardize the ALN-PC partnership. Rather, the Conservatives intend to take an "Akido" approach to their dissidents, channeling their energies to work for the good of the party. While Aviles respects Montealegre, she also criticizes his inability to effectively assert his leadership of his party and the alliance, and believes he would greatly benefit from training to hone his "people skills." End Summary.

Conservative Dissidents Call for Party Unity

12. (C) The week of March 12, Conservative Party (PC) dissidents led by former party president Noel Vidaurre publicly called for party unity and signed a letter sent to PC President Azalia Aviles Salmeron (Reftel) requesting a meeting with party leadership. The PC's Board of Directors, who huddled on March 16 and agreed to hear out Vidaurre, sent PC Assembly lawmaker Alejandro Bolanos and two other members of the party's senior leadership to meet with the dissidents on March 18. Aviles and Bolanos reported to PolCouns on March 20 that William Baez, Yali Molina, and Ariel Granera, all associated with the Conservative dissident group called the "Lilas" (lilacs) also appeared for the meeting although they had not signed the letter. (Note: The Lilas supported Liberal Constitutional Party (PLC) candidate Enrique Bolanos' candidacy instead of the Conservative Party presidential candidate Vidaurre during the 2001 elections. The combination of the PC's green flag with the PLC's red banner creates the color purple.)

What's the Hitch?

13. (C) Aviles and Bolanos remarked that the Conservative dissidents' sudden interest in party unity was suspicious, possibly driven by "interests external to the party's." They are certain that the "Lilas" owe their allegiance to the PLC and may well have been sent by PLC leader Arnolando Aleman to prompt the Conservatives to break from the Nicaraguan

Liberal Alliance (ALN) and leader Montealegre, Aleman's political rival. Although less certain of Vidaurre's motives, Aviles and Bolanos noted that Vidaurre appeared to have overcome his resentment of the Lilas for endorsing Enrique Bolanos' candidacy instead of his own, and both Vidaurre and the Lilas demanded the PC form its own National Assembly caucus as a "pre-condition" for their return to the party fold.

Taking the "Akido" Approach

14. (C) Bolanos recounted that he and the other party representatives listened to the dissidents, clarified that party unity would not come at the cost of leaving the ALN alliance, assured them that the PC's doors are open for all those who are willing to work, and invited them to work for the good of the party. He reasoned that the party cannot afford to ignore the dissidents, nor allow them to make mischief. Thus, PC leaders had decided to refrain from emotional confrontation, and instead, rely on "Akido style tactics" to channel the dissenters' energies to suit the party's purposes. After the dissidents are reincorporated into the party, their loyalties and disloyalties will soon become evident, explained Bolanos, who predicted that most will come around once they receive the attention they crave.

Beware of the Moles

15. (C) Dissidents bearing especially close monitoring, however, are "Lilas" Baez, Molina, and Granera, as well as Vidaurre and talk show host Jaime Arellano, suggested Bolanos. He conjectured that some of these individuals are working to benefit Aleman and his ally Ortega, while others are more driven by their interest in obtaining a leadership position in the Conservative party structure now that the party was re-energized after it won seats in the National Assembly. (Note: Aviles told us that according to a December 2006 poll conducted by generally reputable M&R, 13%-17% of respondents expressed some affiliation or sympathy with the Conservative Party.)

God, Order, and Justice

16. (C) In a meeting with PolCouns and TDY analysts on March 22, Aviles reiterated the PC's commitment to the ALN-PC alliance and its decision not to form an independent caucus at this juncture even though its by-laws stipulate that it should. (Note: Five Conservative Party deputies and nine substitute deputies serve in the National Assembly.) Aviles emphasized the PC's desire to reform its by-laws in order to help the party shed its image of an outdated, elitist party, although it does not intend to alter its basic motto "God, Order, and Justice." While acknowledging that few ideological differences exist any longer between the Conservatives and Liberals, she noted that, unlike the Liberals, the Conservatives are committed to order and prefer gradual change.

A Reluctant Leader

17. (C) Regarding the PC's alliance with the ALN, she clarified that her party signed an agreement in September 2005 with Eduardo Montealegre, who at the time was without a party. While she voiced her respect for Montealegre, Aviles also criticized his inability to effectively assert his leadership of the ALN, adding that Conservative lawmakers in the ALN-PC alliance are frustrated with their caucus' lack of direction in the Assembly. She opined that while Montealegre's natural demeanor is that of the banker that he is -- not a spontaneous flesh-pressing, baby-kissing politician a la Arnoldo Aleman -- he could be groomed to project more to the people. Aviles recounted how in her meeting with Montealegre a week ago, she had attempted to boost his political morale -- assuring him that he is the

most viable opposition leader, and as such, must assume the responsibility. She reported Montealegre was pleased by her compliments, but also appeared uncertain whether he was up to the task.

Comment

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18. (C) Conservative Party leaders have been responsive to our encouraging them to remain in the ALN-PC alliance and refrain from forming a separate caucus at this stage. So long as the ALN recognizes the PC's contributions and if it succeeds in strengthening the alliance, the Conservatives are likely to maintain the status quo. Despite Montealegre's introverted inclinations and his banker reputation, he is politically ambitious and draws public appeal, as evidenced in the polls. He would benefit greatly from political grooming to consolidate his position as opposition leader.
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